

IN THE ROYAL COURTS OF JUSTICE

RE: THE LEVESON INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MRS SHARON MARSHALL

1. This statement is provided in response to a request from the Leveson Inquiry dated 28th October 2011. It is intended to provide the fullest response possible to those questions posed in that letter and to include any other information which is within my knowledge and relevant to those matters being considered by the Inquiry.
2. I understand from the tenor of the request that significant importance has been placed on the content of a book that I wrote and published in 2010 called "*Tabloid Girl*." At the outset, and for the avoidance of doubt, I wish to make it clear that the book was written for entertainment purposes by dramatising anecdotes, experiences and characters that I became aware of during my career as a journalist; it was not meant to be, nor was it, a precise and accurate portrayal of any particular events or individuals.
3. My book is based on a period of journalism from the mid nineties to around 2005 and many of the reporters the tales are based on were either never known to me or are now deceased, resigned, retired or unemployed. In order to write the book I went back over all of my bylined stories over the years and sought to remember in as much detail as I could how they had been obtained or how, in light of the anecdotes I knew, they might have been obtained. I also spoke to several colleagues to ask them to share stories, memories and legends that I could use.
4. The tales in *Tabloid Girl* therefore include the most engaging and compelling details and anecdotes which invariably involve the worst of the industry as recollected by me and my contacts. I condensed them all into a story involving dramatised amalgamations of characters, stories, locations and practices and placed them on a timeline to support the underlying narrative of my career. It was never a fact-checked and substantiated history of my negative experiences of the industry. Many of them may well not be true or accurate in the details and many are and always were incapable of being substantiated and incapable of being attributed to anyone in particular.
5. Accordingly, no reliance can be placed upon those stories as providing a statement or an indication of general practice in the journalism industry, either at a particular newspaper or as a whole, nor can they be relied upon as being a fair account of my

overall impression of the industry. Other than the chapter "The Art of Surviving After Tabloids," on page 267, none of the characters or anecdotes are in anyway based upon my work at either the Sun or ITV1.

6. In my experience, tabloid journalism, like any industry, contains people who act ethically and people who do not. The book does not reference the many hundreds of journalists I have worked with who have produced excellent and ethically sound work for obvious reasons. Much of the work that was conducted was innocuous and of an excitement level comparable to many offices in many areas of business. The overwhelming majority of the work which was conducted by journalists that I was aware of was not in the least bit unethical, in breach of the PCC rules or in any way improper, and those who breached the ethics were the exceptions rather than the rule.
7. Those particular elements of the book which I have been asked to comment on are responded to below.

Who you are and a brief summary of your career history in the media

8. I first joined the tabloid press in the mid-nineties, "shifting" (i.e. working as a casual reporter) at The Daily Star, The Daily Express, The London Evening Standard, The Times and the Sunday Express. In the late nineties I took on staff reporter positions with The Daily Star, The Daily Express and The Sunday Express, and joined the Sunday People as a show-business reporter and columnist from 1998 - 2002. I worked at the News of the World from 2002-2004 as TV Editor and ghost-writer for celebrity columns. In January 2006 I joined The Sun and contributed weekly humorous lifestyle columns until August 2007.
9. I currently work as a presenter with ITV1's This Morning show, and as an author and scriptwriter. I no longer work for any newspaper titles.

How you understood the system of corporate governance to work in practice at News of the World and The Sun, with particular emphasis on systems to ensure lawful, professional and ethical conduct

The Sun:

10. At The Sun my contribution was to file a column about my weight loss whilst I was appearing as a participant in the 2006 TV show "*Celebrity Fit Club*." Following this I wrote a column for a period of 12 months called "*No Sex in the City*" which was about the London dating scene. Other than to sign my contract I never actually visited their offices and so I was unaware of what steps in particular were taken at The Sun to ensure lawful, professional and ethical conduct prevailed. I can only comment on the conduct of those staff that I dealt with on the phone and email for my own column, all

of whom, so far as I was concerned, complied with all legal, professional and ethical guidelines and never gave me any concern to that the case might be otherwise.

News of the World:

11. When I worked at News of the World I was handed a booklet on my first day of employment which is still in my possession. It is a Journalist's Staff Handbook which, amongst other things, outlines the PCC Code of Practice. I can provide you with this document but assume that News International have already provided a sample booklet to you.
12. As regards the regulation of lawful, professional and ethical conduct, we had a legal team that anyone with a legal concern could email or call in order to discuss it. I may have emailed them for guidance on how to proceed with stories over the years but am unable to recollect why, what guidance I may have asked for, or what guidance was given. To the best of my memory, none of the stories I wrote incurred any legal actions or complaints from any individuals or organisations, nor did they attract any attention or action from the PCC. Accordingly, I was never involved personally in any discussions about whether there had been any unethical or illegal conduct in any story I had filed and cannot advise any further about the process involved in doing so.
13. In understanding the nature of those structures which ensured lawful, professional and ethical journalism it is important to first understand the general practice of journalists.
14. As journalists, the byline was everything and there was intense competition for stories which would build personal reputation and prestige. Protecting the story and its source was central to career progression and so even though journalists might be working on desks which were next to each other, we acted independently and very rarely collaboratively. That approach was so rigorously adopted that if a reporter was on a big, or front page, story, they would often be moved away to another office, out of earshot from their colleagues so they could work and talk without anyone knowing what they were doing. They would report only to their immediate superior or the Editor and not discuss their work with anyone else. Accordingly, the work styles and origins of stories of other journalists, along with the ethics of those styles and origins, was, as a whole, not common knowledge.
15. Those stories and anecdotes that were commonly traded and talked about, and which were included in my book, were the same as many stories and anecdotes in any industry and rarely led back to a single identifiable source. More commonly than not, people just simply did not ask where the stories came from. I filed my own stories to my own line manager and that was my only role. I was not in a managerial role that involved me needing to know how other stories had been obtained.
16. Those individuals who would have been privy to the nature of the story and the ethics

of the methods used to obtain it were the management, very rarely other reporters. Any discussions about the nature and origin, as well as the ethics, were not held in the open office but were instead held in Editorial Meetings. As those Editorial Meetings did not concern me or my work I did not attend any of them and so I cannot shed any light on whether or not the sources of the stories, ethical or otherwise, were revealed by the journalists to the managers or Editor. Similarly, I cannot comment on what steps, if any, were taken regarding any breaches of ethics. As that was the system to control ethics, along with the referral to the lawyers, I assumed that whatever steps were needed to be taken to ensure ethical guidelines were followed were being taken. For my own account, I simply did not come into contact with the lawful, professional or ethical control systems due to the nature of my work and so cannot comment on how any enforcement might have taken place or who would have enforced it.

Whether the documents and policies referred to above were adhered to in practice, to the best of your knowledge

17. In specific reference to The Sun, given that my contribution was filing a column remotely and that I did not work in their offices, I cannot comment on their policies other than to say that to the best of my knowledge they always acted perfectly ethically and I had no reason to suspect otherwise.
18. As regards News of the World, the fact that several of my ex News of the World colleagues are currently on bail facing charges suggests that they did not adhere to policies.
19. It must also be said that I was aware of several apologies and lawsuits against the newspaper which again suggests that ethical standards were not always maintained. But because that was a common enough occurrence across the industry as a whole, including those newspapers that I worked for and those that I didn't, that it did not influence my view that ethical breaches were anything more than isolated incidents.
20. In my experience, and as is common to all industries, there were good and bad individuals, some of whom acted ethically, some of whom did not. At the time, I was aware of anecdotes which suggested that some unethical practices were being engaged in, but I was not aware of any identified individual reporters that acted unethically as I was not involved in the news gathering process of other journalists. As noted above, and as already noted at some length in the Inquiry, it was the managers who were in a position to discover the unethical practices in the Editorial Meetings and at other meetings and to take action. I was not in a senior enough position on the newspaper to be consulted on any of this.

Whether you were made aware of the PCC Code when you were working at The

Sun or News of the World, whether compliance with the Code was a contractual obligation and to what extent the Code was referred to in making decisions as to whether to publish stories you were involved with;

21. As previously stated, on commencement of employment at News International, which at the time owned The Sun and News of the World, I was given a company handbook which outlined the PCC code.
22. My contracts which I signed when commencing employment may well have contained statements outlining contractual obligations, I am afraid they are no longer in my possession, but they were standard contracts and I am sure News International can provide you with a sample.

The Sun:

23. At the Sun I was not publishing stories or reporting but was merely writing a lifestyle column. I had a discussion with the Editor when my column commenced and there was no reason to be concerned with any of the ethics of my work. However, it was decided to give all people, other than myself, false monikers in order not to embarrass or defame them. Therefore, the only person that could possibly be defamed, insulted or offended in any way would be myself. The nature of my work for the title meant that the subject of ethics never arose again.

News of the World:

24. At News of the World the staff booklet outlines the PCC Code and states that

"The Editor requires staff to observe the Code in both the spirit and the letter."

My contract was a standard News International contract and may well have outlined contractual obligations in addition to this, but as noted above I do not have a copy of that contract.

25. I was aware of my obligations and to the best of my knowledge I believe I adhered to the Code on all occasions and in all decisions whilst at the News of the World. As stated above, the question of ethics never came up for me and I am therefore unaware of what steps were taken to enforce it.
26. However, on one occasion I was asked to carry out a story which I understood to be in clear breach of the Code; I refused to carry it out and subsequently resigned. I made the matter known to my Editor and my Deputy Editor at the time and my Editor informed me that they had not been aware that I had been asked to breach the Code until I reported it.
27. It was my understanding that the Editor spoke to the instigator of the ethics breach

regarding this matter, but I was not involved in any conversations or informed of their content or outcome. My sole concern at the time was that the story should not be published because of the ethics breach, and it never was. My subsequent conversations with the Editor centred solely on my wish to terminate my employment with the newspaper and his attempts to persuade me to stay. I did not question him on any steps that may have been taken to enforce ethical standards as a result of me reporting this incident, but given that to my knowledge he had always acted in a perfectly ethical way in any story I discussed with him I have no reason to assume that he did not act in an entirely proper way to uphold the ethical standards required.

28. As I left the newspaper following this incident I cannot provide the Inquiry with any evidence of any actions that management may or may not have taken internally to enforce ethical standards following my report.

The extent to which you felt any financial and/or commercial pressure from the proprietors of your newspaper, the editor or anyone else, and whether any such pressure affected any of the decisions you made

29. There are two types of reporting – reporting as a ‘casual’ or shift-worker and a full time contract as a staff reporter.
30. I started as a shift-worker in the mid nineties and at that time I felt there was intense pressure as a shift-worker from your newsdesk and the Editor. As a shift-worker you are not given any contractual rights as you are only hired for a 24 hour period on a day to day basis. You must prove your worth each day or else face the fact that it is likely that you will not be hired again at that newspaper. The pressure was not therefore from the Editor or the proprietors of the newspaper, but was more from a desire to continue working and to build up a reputation as a successful journalist ready to get taken on full time as a staff reporter.
31. As a staff reporter there is also pressure to perform and to continue to deliver. On several occasions I was put under intense pressure from my Editor or immediate superior to deliver “front of book” stories; those stories which were good enough to make the front page. That pressure never included any references to ethical concerns or their breach; it was understood to be a given that you would not breach the ethical standards no matter what the pressure was.
32. Competition between journalists was always very high. In one newsroom, reporters from the same paper were actually pitched on the same job in direct competition with each other and it was made clear that your position on the newspaper was precarious, and could be ended, unless you delivered the copy. This added to pressure and stress in the job. It was the custom at the time I worked for the number of ‘bylines’ to be counted and the journalist delivering the least front pages to be subject to more

pressure and increased fear they would lose their job.

33. Despite the strong pressure, I cannot remember any story in which I would say that the pressure from Editors or management affected decision making in a negative or unethical way, it was more that you would be prepared to work longer hours, and often work through the night to deliver the copy demanded by your manager. It was fairly normal to work a 48 hour shift or beyond, staying in the office, or on a job overnight, just to get it done.
34. I never met or spoke to the newspaper's proprietor during any of my years on the newspaper, nor received any instruction which was said to have come from them.

Is the anecdote about your appearance on an episode of Friends, and the circumstances in which that came about, which begins at p.20 of your book Tabloid Girl" ("your book") true?

35. The relevance of this particular matter is not known, but the facts of the matter are as follows.
36. As stated above, my book should be regarded as a dramatisation of my life as a tabloid reporter up until the summer of 2004 rather than a legal or historically accurate document.
37. As I outline at the start of the book I have merged several identities of reporters, and changed dates and timings. I have also dramatised several events and, as I admit in the book, "fiddled" with the truth to disguise identities.
38. Regarding my anecdote about my appearance in Friends, the basic facts are true. I did doorstep an actress called Miss Helen Baxendale who appeared in the TV series, I did go down to where the programme was being filmed in London, I did get offered a part as an extra, I did meet the cast, I did file my copy from a lavatory and I did appear on-screen in the episode entitled The One with Ross's Wedding.
39. In reality, given that all these events took place in 1998 I can no longer remember exactly what conversations took place, when, where or with whom and I have no documentation to support the account. You should therefore take any details beyond those indicated above as they were intended to be taken when written: as a fictional account of events intended to provide a good story.

You describe, in a section commencing at p.63 of your book, how your colleague 'Robohack' got a story by: 'finding, wooing, then bedding the best mate of the female TV star. During their late night romantic meetings, the champagne by the

side of the bed covered by expenses, he'd carefully tucked a tape recorder under the pillow. Eventually the post-coital conversation had turned to her famous friend,..."

a. From what source did you obtain this understanding of events?

b.To the best of your knowledge is the account which you give in your book true?

40. Firstly, it must be understood that 'Robohack' is not just based on one individual. As I explain in the book-I have merged several identities into single characters. Robohack is an amalgamation of some character traits of some journalists I have met and worked with, or heard of over the years, both male and female, and several anecdotes have been attributed to Robohack in the book, despite not being a real person.
41. When answering this question and dealing with journalist anecdotes as a whole, it is important to bear in mind the journalism culture. Journalism is a profession in which tales are swapped over a drink about how stories are obtained; they are not documented tales exchanged in formal meetings. Due to the highly competitive nature of the industry, many journalists rather revel in a reputation of ruthlessness and would allow or even encourage pub tales about them to go unchecked or exaggerated to increase their notoriety and thereby enhance their reputation.
42. In terms of the tale on page 63, my source was a colleague who did not tell me where they got the story from, only that it was general knowledge in the industry. When I checked the story I discovered that it was true that a story was written in which a TV star's "*frantic cocaine and sex session*" is detailed. It is true that the individual whose byline appeared on the piece was nicknamed in the industry as "*love rat*," and that the reason for this moniker was that he had conned his girlfriend at the time into giving the story about her TV star friend by taping their conversations. As the basic facts were correct and the underlying narrative fit into the style of my book, I included it.
43. As to the precise details quoted in the request, I have no evidence that they are true, they were included for dramatisation. I never asked the journalist directly whether the anecdote was accurate as to how he obtained the story and his moniker and I was obviously not present for any conversations he may or may not have had with any partner of his or of the other details concerning champagne and the tape recorder. It may well be that the truth was rather more mundane and that the story was obtained whilst respecting journalistic standards and following them to the letter.
44. Without a doubt, my account is a dramatisation of what may already have been an embellished account of the episode.

At page 65 of your book you describe a colleague encouraging a caller who

claimed to have slept with a television actor (Dean Gaffney) to call again immediately if there were ever two girls involved or "one of the Mitchells". Is this account of the telephone call true? Did your colleagues often encourage "kiss and tells" to engage in more salacious activity?

45. As above, this should be seen as a dramatisation of events. However, it is true that newspapers would publish a telephone number which encouraged readers to call in with any potential news stories, and it is true that as a result of this certain ladies would call in on this number and describe details of sexual encounters with celebrities to see if the newspaper would be interested in printing a 'kiss and tell'.
46. However all newsdesk conversations in the book should again be regarded as dramatisations given that it is several years since I worked in a newsroom and I was writing a book to sell, not a documentary. The phrases "one of the Mitchells" and "ever two girls involved" should be seen as a fictional storytelling devices.
47. In terms of Dean Gaffney in particular, my colleagues received several calls over the years about his rather exotic personal life which resulted in headlines by other journalists including: "*Naked Eastender wanted 5-in-bed bender,*" "*I got Dean & dirty with EastEnder sweepers!*," and "*ALBERT SQUARE STREET CLEANERS TEAM UP FOR 3-IN-A-BED EASTENDERS.*" The merits of the story itself aside, I was unaware of any ethical questions arising from the stories.
48. Further, as the journalism colleague I based this conversation on is now deceased I am unable to give you any more information about any conversations he may have had. At no point did I witness any reporter actively encourage young women to try and engage with salacious activity with any other cast members of any soaps, whether "Mitchell" or otherwise for the purposes of a "kiss and tell." My knowledge of the situation is that the only active encouragement of any kind that was engaged in was an encouragement to contact the newspaper and report it if it did happen.

At page 73 of your book you are describing an incident in which Ginger (a shifter) was found not to have read the papers and was peremptorily fired. Is this anecdote true? Was the manner of the dismissal, the editor's language and tone unusual for the newspaper?

49. I am unaware of the relevance of this particular matter on the ethics of journalism as opposed to employment regulations, but respond to the question as follows.
50. The nature of a shifter or casual worker is as described above; they work on daily contracts which are renewed each day according to their performance. Accordingly, if they failed to deliver, or failed to impress then their employment would be terminated and they would not be hired again for that newspaper. To say that they were fired is

probably to go too far, they would simply not be re-engaged.

51. "Ginger" is a fictional reporter and, once again, this account should not be seen as a true account of the nature of a dismissal, more as an indication of the sort of thing that could have occurred in that environment and of which shifters were always afraid.
52. Additionally, the Editor in that anecdote is an amalgamation of people in the industry, some I worked for, some I knew only by reputation. The tone and language I have given the character is fairly typical of a genre of newspaper Editor that existed within the industry whilst I worked there. It is certainly true to say that instant sackings were carried out on shifters, but given that they were only employed on a day to day basis the Editor considered themselves entitled to do this and it was accepted as being a part of the job by shifters.
53. One story that I am able to recall which is similar in nature is that one reporter received a dressing down when they were not able to hold a conversation with the Editor about Victoria Beckham's current hair style one day. As it was several years ago I am unable to remember who the reporter was, or if they were subsequently sacked for this offence. It is my understanding that dressing down's from management occurs in every industry, and I would not have said that it was unusual for the newspaper business or indeed business as a whole.

At page 155 of your book you describe listening with a "snapper" through the walls of a hotel room to a seduction involving Peter Andre and Jordan on their night together out of the jungle. Is your account true? Is it representative of the tactics used by tabloid journalists to obtain stories?

54. It is true that whilst reporting for *I'm A Celebrity...*, myself and fellow journalists attempted to follow Peter Andre and Jordan to see if they were sharing the same hotel room. This was a fairly typical tactic of the industry and on the night in question there were several reporters attempting to gain access to their floor.
55. However, due to the layout of the hotel and security we were unable to gain much information on the night and my account was a dramatisation of events. As I was not present in their hotel room I have no evidence that a "seduction scene" had taken place on the actual night but felt confident in including this detail in the book given that the female celebrity in question had later given a fairly graphic account of what actually took place during a television interview.
56. However, the other details are not true; I did not actually use a 'snapper' to try and hear a seduction scene through a wall on this or any occasion. I simply wrote it in this way as I felt it made a better story. Similar to the above stories, this was an amalgamation of true events and general journalistic tales told on social occasions that

suggested some reporters used tape recorders in adjacent rooms to get a story reproduced in this way to make the book as entertaining as possible. I could not provide any evidence or details of when this might have actually happened, who might have actually done it, or whether anyone really ever did do this.

At page 168 of your book you describe as a classic tabloid tactic, used for obtaining a photograph of or conversation with a person or persons staying in a hotel, namely setting off the fire alarm. Is this assertion true? Without naming the person who triggered the alarm, do you know this tactic to have been used?

57. To put this particular tactic in context it must be understood that in Sunday tabloids you often have a story that is obtained in the week but that must be protected and "held" for a period of several days until your edition is printed. On occasions during my career I would be asked to 'guard' an interviewee for several days in a hotel location to ensure no-one else was able to speak to them before a story could be printed. I was certainly briefed at points in my career by experienced reporters that if a fire alarm went off in a hotel where I was guarding an interviewee that, I should take care as the alarm may have been triggered by a rival reporter who was after a sneaked photograph or quote from photograph the person I was guarding.
58. Whilst I was guarding interviewees I have had a fire alarm go off on one occasion, but I have no evidence that it was the action of a rival or a mere coincidence, other than that the hotel did not actually burn down. In a similar manner to the use of a tape recorded, it is unclear if it was a tactic that was actually used or was just a tactic that had been thought of and which had to be protected against. Accordingly, I am unable to provide the enquiry with any specific examples or evidence of stories which were gained in this way. However, it was a clever and interesting story which was why it was included in my book.
59. I am unaware if the tactic was used more generally, outside of the specific time when stories were being guarded.

At page 254 of your book "Tabloid Girl", you suggest that although no journalist would admit it, journalists did at the time you worked in the newspaper industry hack into voicemail messages. You go on to say that one hack used this trick so often he was nicknamed "The Olympic Flame" (as he sourced so many stories this way, he never went out). We do not require you to name any individuals, but we require you to tell us how you came to be aware of this information. How widespread was it across the industry, to the best of your knowledge?

60. At the time Tabloid Girl was written one reporter had been jailed for intercepting voicemail messages. I refer you to a newspaper article in the Daily Mail dated 29

November 2006 headlined: *'Phone tap royal editor nicknamed the Olympic Flame'*. This and other articles referred to a nickname of Olympic or Eternal Flame which the industry had given the errant reporter. That was my primary source of information for this story as the reporter who earned this nickname was arrested long after I worked at the newspaper and I never discussed any of his activities with him, including the sources of his stories or his methods of obtaining them. I combined it with the dramatisation of my history in the business as a whole to build up a more compelling and entertaining book.

61. As a result of basic phone knowledge as well as the journalism and investigations that had uncovered that particular scandal, at the time of writing the book I was aware of one method of phone hacking; typing a four digit PIN number into a phone without a password to access a person's voicemail messages. I wrote about this method on page 254 of the book and on page 255 I tell you how to safeguard your phone against this, but I had no direct evidence of any particular journalist using this method. Again, I had only anecdotal or pub tales that this happened.
62. The only colleague of mine who has admitted in newspaper interviews to using this tactic is now deceased, but at the time I did not know that he engaged in such activities as we simply did not discuss the sources of his stories and you could not tell what was going on just by watching or listening to him working. Everyone in the office made phone calls all day long and if some of those phone calls involved phone hacking there was simply nothing to suggest that they did to anyone else in the office, or that those calls were for any reason different from any other legitimate phone calls.
63. The second method of hacking phones, namely hiring a private detective to carry out more complex work to access a protected voicemail, was unknown to me during the time I worked in newspapers and at the time I wrote the book. Had I been aware of it I would certainly have written about it. Even now I only know what I have read in newspaper articles since. Accordingly, I have no information or evidence as to how many journalists, or which journalists on which newspapers used this method, or even how it would be done.
64. However, I would say most reporters across the industry were aware that phone hacking existed, especially after the arrest of one reporter. It was another method of obtaining a story and so it was talked about, the same as the fire alarm in the hotel approach. But this is not to say that they actually did it themselves or knew of anyone in particular who did it, and I have no evidence whatsoever, whether documentary or as a witness, that any reporter actually obtained stories in this manner.
65. All of the reporters and staff who have been arrested as a result of phone hacking worked in a different department to me and would not have discussed methods with me. As noted above, the only time that the ethics could or would have been discussed was with management in meetings.

66. Having said that, as I was not present at any such meetings I have no evidence that any Editor I worked for was ever aware that stories had been obtained in this way. I never saw anyone admit to an Editor that a story had been gained through phone hacking, nor did I hear anyone say that such an admission had been made.
67. If anything, in those departmental news meetings that I did attend most reporters sought to win the admiration of their Features or News Editor by insisting that any information they had was gained for a story was gained through their fabulous contacts and sheer journalistic brilliance and dedication. I never witnessed anyone admit they had got a story simply through typing in four numbers into a phone, and it would have been career suicide had they done so in front of everyone else.

Could you please tell the Inquiry whether, to the best of your knowledge, your newspaper(s) used, paid or had any connection with private investigators in order to source stories or information and/or paid or received payments in kind for such information from the police, public officials, mobile phone companies or others with access to the same: if so, please provide details of the numbers of occasions on which such investigators or other external providers of information were used and of the amounts paid to them (NB. You are not required to identify individuals, either within your newspaper or otherwise)

68. I was aware that newspapers would frequently use private investigators in an entirely legal and ethical manner, such as to obtain addresses or mobile phone numbers as part of a legitimate investigation. I myself made calls of this nature to one private investigator as instructed by my superior, but to the best of my knowledge and belief the information asked for was entirely ethical and legal and was gained in a legal and ethical way. Using private investigators in this way was simply a better use of resources, not a way of circumventing the PCC rules or of covering tracks. Given that it is several years since I worked in newspapers I am unable to provide you with any dates or any sort of breakdown of which reporters phoned which investigators for which stories. I would never have had any access to documents which detailed payments.
69. I am unaware of any particular story or incident in which journalists may have or did obtained information directly or indirectly from the police, public officials, mobile phone companies or any others with access to the same on any newspaper I worked for.
70. I am also unaware of any general culture of journalists obtaining information directly or indirectly from the police, public officials, mobile phone companies or others with access to the same generally on any newspaper I worked for. Aside from those published by newspapers recently, I am unaware of any stories, anecdotal or

otherwise, that concerned such activities.

71. I never attended any meeting in which these practices were discussed, or heard anyone say they had obtained a story in this way on any of the newspapers I worked for.
72. Throughout my time working at the newspapers I was never in a sufficiently senior position where I would oversee any investigation which could ever have used any of these methods, nor was I engaged in any journalism that would have required such methods to be used.
73. I have read reports detailing that a private investigator named Glenn Mulcaire was used by News of the World. In the interests of full disclosure I wish to make it clear that I am unable to provide any details whatsoever of what he did, how much he was paid, or who commissioned him. I never had any contact with him or knowledge of him or his work.

The Inquiry is also keen to obtain your evidence on other aspects of the practices, culture and ethics of the press. To the best of your knowledge, did email or computer hacking take place?

74. I was not aware of any hacking of email or computers whilst I worked at the newspapers. I am only aware of what has been published recently on the subject. None of those reporters named worked in my department and in some cases they worked in different countries, and I had minimal contact with them, if any. I was therefore unaware of their practices and methods of obtaining a story. All of those practices of which I was aware were included in my book, albeit it in dramatised fashion.
75. For the avoidance of doubt, I did not attend any meetings at which email or computer hacking was discussed and I was not of sufficiently senior status within the newspapers to have been consulted or informed about it.

We note at page 105 of your book you describe "Robohack" as having impersonated a doctor in order to get a story and photographs about a celebrity. Is your account true to the best of your or (sic) belief? You tell a similar story about him at page 250 when he is said to have worn a white coat to gain access to a dying man. How common was "blagging" (pretending to be someone else in order to obtain information)? Again, there is no need to name individuals and/or newspapers, but an indication of how widespread across the industry this practice was would be helpful, as would some examples of the types of blagging which was undertaken.

76. As stated above, Robohack is an amalgamation of characters across the industry, not all of which I knew personally and whose stories were not fact-checked.
77. The story on page 105 could be fairly described as a tabloid legend, spread around by journalists for entertainment rather than for accuracy. The telling of the story I received was that one reporter gained a photograph of a celebrity in a coma by posing as a doctor in a hospital. However, this was purely anecdotal and I do not have any evidence that it is true, who the celebrity was supposed to be or even know who the specific reporter is who is said to have done it.
78. The story on page 250 is based on an anecdote which I believe to be true of a reporter who had gained a story by wearing a white coat and turning up at a particular house. As I understand it, the reporter was invited in and gained details from the family about a dying relative which later ran as a story. They did not correct the family's assumption that they were a doctor rather than a reporter. However, I have only anecdotal evidence of this and the precise details of the tale as described in the book should be seen as a dramatisation.
79. However, it is certainly true that blagging took place, often crossing from the credible to the ridiculous. The tale in my book about the reporter dressed in a cow costume who was required to stand in a field pretending to be a cow is true. It is also true that a reporter dressed as a cleaner in order to gain a story from a rival publication.
80. It is certainly true that blagging was a method commonly used to allow the reporter to get as close to the source of the story as possible to get the very best out of it. All of the stories that I can recall are already in the book and, so far as I am aware, the basic facts are true.
81. In addition, it is a very well known and respected journalistic practice for investigative journalists to try and gain jobs at the Palace or within public institutions and private enterprises as part of investigative stories to uncover particular practices or to discover certain facts, some with public policy implications and some without. That approach is simply long-term blagging and whilst such activities may cross a line, as responsible journalism it would not be considered to be particularly unethical.
82. As regards the ethics of blagging, it was generally viewed as fair game to use blagging to delude a rival publication, and a reporter who posed as a cleaner and took a rival paper's first edition in order to copy a story they had bought was admired in the industry. It was also regarded as fair game to blag your way into a wedding or a party if the celebrity had sold coverage rights to a rival publication. Although it would be infuriating if a story was lost to a rival, the sporting thing to do would be to grudgingly congratulate the blagger over a consolatory drink.

83. The stories which are considered in the book, such as the journalist posing as a doctor or deceiving their own partner for a story, whether these stories are true or not, were viewed as unethical and shocking even by journalists used to the excesses of the industry as a whole. It was never considered appropriate to deceive or mislead the public at large to their detriment, or to take unfair advantage of a particular vulnerability as the reporters in those stories did. Those stories were passed around, but not as shining examples of how to do business, rather as stories that were so outrageous in their nature that they never failed to obtain a negative and shocked reaction.
84. It was the shocking nature of the stories that meant that they were included in my book and combined with the intentionally unsavoury character of Robohack who was designed to shock and repel the reader as being the embodiment of the worst excesses of the industry.
85. As I analyse in detail in the book, in my view there were reporters that went too far in the blind pursuit of a story and desperation to fill the pages. However, at the time I was not aware of the newspaper accounts following this Inquiry and its revelations that abuse was endemic or that there was any sanctioning from any management as the current news cycle appears to indicate. With the recent coverage it is becoming increasingly clear as the investigations and the Inquiry continues that I was not aware of the full extent of how far some journalists were prepared to go in gaining stories. Whilst I write about errant reporters with a certain level of sympathy in the book and try to explain what drove their actions, had I been aware of the true excesses and breaches of ethics I would have expressed rather more horror and much less compassion. The culture, such as it was, never justified those abuses which have been documented in the Inquiry and newspapers and in my experience it was not necessary to breach ethical rules in order to produce high quality journalism and front page stories.

Yours sincerely

Sharon Marshall